



# Committee On Finance

Max Baucus, Ranking Member

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## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Baucus Introduces Legislation to Eliminate Cuba Travel Ban On Senate Floor, Senator Urges Opening Doors, Bringing Democracy to Region**

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) Senator Max Baucus today continued his efforts to promote democracy in Cuba by introducing bipartisan legislation that would allow all Americans to travel freely to Cuba. Sens. Mike Enzi (R-Wyo.) and Byron Dorgan (D-N.D.) today joined Baucus in introducing the bill.

Earlier this year, Baucus introduced broad legislation that would seek to normalize relations with Cuba by lifting the trade embargo against Cuba and removing travel restrictions between the two countries. Today's legislation works to keep up the momentum by solely addressing the travel restrictions. A bipartisan group in the House is expected to introduce companion legislation in the next several weeks.

"After forty-three years, it ought to be clear to everyone that the embargo has failed to weaken Castro," Baucus said on the Senate floor today. "A better approach is to reach out to the Cuban people. Ending the travel ban is the first and best way to do this."

Cuban President Fidel Castro has recently arrested and jailed more than 80 dissidents for speaking out in favor of democracy. Castro's actions have received worldwide condemnation from democratic governments, human rights organizations and members of the U.S. Senate and House, including Senator Baucus.

"Castro's actions against the dissidents are appalling," Baucus said. "But by continuing and even strengthening the embargo and travel ban against Cuba, we are only further closing off the country and preventing democracy."

"Some seem to think that the embargo is a rational response to the Castro regime. If you believe that an embargo can hurt Castro without hurting the Cuban people, then tightening the embargo might make some sense. But it doesn't work that way. The embargo harms the Cuban people more than it will ever harm Castro," Baucus added.

Baucus also highlighted the benefits that open travel would provide to American farmers and ranchers and the country's economy. While Americans are currently allowed to sell food and medicine to Cuba on a cash-basis, the majority of potential sales are not realized due to the travel ban and trade embargo, Baucus said.

"One study of American sales with Cuba has suggested that lifting the travel ban could result in an additional quarter billion dollars of agricultural sales and create thousands of jobs," Baucus said. "If we truly care about the Cuban people; if we care about democracy...let us travel to Cuba and show them democracy in action."

Also cosponsoring the bill are Sens. Jeff Bingaman (D-N.M.), Lincoln Chaffee (R-R.I.), Larry Craig (R-ID), Tim Johnson (D-S.D.) and Mark Dayton (D-Minn.)

-- Floor Statement Attached --

**Floor Statement on Cuba Travel Ban Legislation**  
**Senator Max Baucus**  
**April 30, 2003**

Mr. President, I rise today to offer legislation – along with my colleagues Senator Enzi and Senator Dorgan – that would end the restrictions placed on travel to Cuba.

I understand our colleagues in the House will introduce companion legislation in the coming weeks. I look forward to working with my colleagues in both chambers – and on both sides of the aisle – as we move forward.

With this legislation, we are undertaking a serious cause. Repeal of the travel ban is long overdue.

There are numerous reasons to introduce this legislation, but I want to focus today on just two: first, the current situation in Cuba; and second, our troubled economy here at home.

Introduction of this legislation comes at a crucial time in U.S.-Cuba relations. Last month, nearly 80 Cuban dissidents were arrested. All of them have been sentenced to an average of almost 20 years in prison.

Democratic governments around the world, as well as human rights organizations and others - including myself and my colleagues in the Senate and House Cuba Working Groups - have harshly criticized the Castro regime for these appalling acts of repression.

Yet, throughout all of this, the Castro regime has remained defiant and undaunted.

Why? In my view it is because Castro *wants* the embargo to continue. Observers have noted an emerging pattern: every time we get close to more open relations, Castro shuts the process down with some repressive act, designed to have a chilling effect on U.S.-Cuban relations.

Castro fears an end to the embargo. He knows the day the embargo falls is the day he runs out of excuses. Without the embargo, Castro would have no one to blame for the failing Cuban economy.

Nor would his way of governing be able to survive the influx of Americans and democratic ideas that would flood his island if the embargo were lifted.

Now, some Cuba watchers have predicted that the dissident arrests and the resulting decline of U.S.-Cuba relations are a death knell to the engagement debate in Washington.

I strongly disagree. And I think now - more than ever - a genuine, honest debate about the merits of the embargo is needed.

Some people seem to think tightening the embargo is a rational response to the Castro regime. I guess if you think an embargo can hurt Castro without hurting the Cuban people, then tightening the embargo might make some sense.

But it doesn't work that way. The embargo actually hurts the Cuban people much more than it hurts Castro.

This is why many Cuban dissidents, including Oswaldo Paya – the founder of the Varela Project – oppose our embargo and support engagement.

Indeed, after forty-three years, it ought to be clear to everyone that the embargo has failed to weaken Castro. A better approach is to reach out to the Cuban people. Ending the travel ban is the first and best way to do this.

If Castro fears contact between the Cuban people and the American people, the rational American response is to send *more* Americans, not fewer.

Of course, ending the travel ban would have benefits not only for the Cuban people, but also for Americans. Ending the travel ban would have an immediate and direct economic impact, beyond even the immediate travel sector.

Most importantly for my home state of Montana, ending the travel ban would help farmers and ranchers.

Americans are currently allowed to sell food and medicine to Cuba on a cash-basis. But there is a lot of red tape thrown in their way. And without the ability to travel to Cuba and develop the business contacts, the full potential of these sales is not realized.

In fact, one study has suggested that lifting the travel ban could result in an additional quarter billion dollars of agricultural sales, and create thousands of new jobs.

Ending the travel ban would bring benefits to both Cubans and to Americans. And that, after all, is what this debate should be about. Supporters of the embargo are so focused on hurting Castro that they actually strengthen him – at the expense of the Cuban people, and at the expense of our own economy.

I hope my colleagues will join me in co-sponsoring this important legislation. I believe it is the best way to show that we truly care about the Cuban people.

And indeed, if we truly care about democracy, then let us send Cuba exactly that. Let us travel to Cuba and show them democracy in action. Thank you.